

Chapter 2: Need for the General Plan Update/Plan Development Process

Regional Growth Projections

A generally accepted twenty-five year population and employment growth forecast for the Fresno County region has been prepared by the Central California Futures Institute (CCFI) affiliated with California State University Fresno. The revised CCFI report titled "Population Forecast for Fresno County to 2025" (dated April 2000) provides a prudent forecast for a modest average annual population growth rate of 1.9 percent between the years 2000 and 2025. This growth forecast, prepared for and accepted by the Council of Fresno County Governments, indicates that the county population will increase by 479,407 people (58 percent) from a population of 821,797 to a population of 1,301,204 by December 31, 2025. While the CCFI forecast used an estimated year 2000 population slightly higher than the United States 2000 Census (799,407 as of April 2000), the long-range forecast remains appropriate and is consistent with the State of California Department of Finance population estimate for January 1, 2001, of 823,909.

Consistent with the historical development and growth trends that have occurred during the past several decades, it is expected that approximately 61 percent of the county population will be accommodated within the Fresno Metropolitan Area. Therefore, the 2025 Fresno General Plan is intended to have population of capacity of 790,000 people over the 25-year planning horizon. In order to accommodate this projected growth, it is necessary to implement strategies of more efficient utilization of resources together with intensified and innovative development patterns. However, even with the successful implementation of plan strategies promoting revitalization of older neighborhoods, urban infill, and intensified transit oriented mixed-use development, the forecasted population growth and economic development can not be contained within the City of Fresno's planned urban boundary and sphere of influence identified by the 1983 Joint Resolution on Metropolitan Planning and 1984 Fresno General Plan (as amended).

The planned urban boundary and sphere of influence designated by the 1984 Fresno General Plan (amended) as depicted by Exhibit 1 encompasses approximately 90,000 acres (140.1 square miles) and provides for a potential 34-percent increase of the city's year 2000 incorporated area of 67,114-acres (104.9 square miles). Excluding the various kinds of transportation rights-of-way, it is estimated that this sphere of influence contains land parcels totaling approximately 75,000 acres in area and provides a population capacity of approximately 671,000 people if developed in accordance with the 1984 Fresno General Plan depicted by Exhibit 3. This potential capacity is substantially less than the Fresno Metropolitan Area's 61 percent (790,000 population) proportional share of the region's projected 1,301,204 population projected for the year 2025.

The insufficient capacity of the 1984 Fresno General Plan to meet the city's proportion of the forecasted population increase and economic development constitutes one of the compelling reasons to reconsider long range planning strategies for the area's future. Accordingly, land use plan changes and development strategies have been devised to accommodate the projected population and economic growth including intensification of related commercial, industrial, and public facility uses.

This strategy continues to focus upon new and innovative strategies to revitalize existing neighborhoods and more efficiently utilize urbanized areas by providing for 86.4 percent (725,000 people) of the forecasted population within the constrained 1984 urban boundary. However, it is also necessary to accommodate approximately 13.6 percent (65,000 people) of the forecasted 479,407 population growth within an additional urban area and sphere of influence of approximately 12,800 acres (20 square miles) (Exhibit 1). Although the population growth and economic development forecasted to occur by the year 2025 can not be accommodated within the 1983 Joint Planning Resolution urban boundary, the 2025 Fresno General Plan strives to apply land use arrangements and development patterns that minimize the extent of urban growth.

The 2025 Fresno General Plan reinforces and expands upon strategies initially introduced with previously considered general plan update alternatives (Fresno 2000 General Plan) to maximize efficient use of land and resources and accommodate new opportunities for industrial development within the adopted urban boundary. It minimizes outward geographic expansion by increasing the intensity and efficiency of urban uses (see Exhibit 4). Agricultural lands and rural or low density uses are not retained in those areas where it is feasible to extend urban facilities and services. The multiple activity centers urban form concept utilizing appropriate clustering of higher intensity or mixed use development and the mid-rise/high-rise corridor intensification concept are also supported by this plan. As a result the plan provides for an increased population density factor approaching 8.7 persons per plan area acre as compared to the approximately 6.2 persons per plan area acre existing within the incorporated city boundaries in the year 2000. With a proposal for strategically focused intensification, the 2025 General Plan can accommodate a population of 790,000. This capacity includes 725,000 people within the 1983 Joint Planning Resolution urban boundary plus an additional 65,000 people within the North and Southeast Growth Areas (see Table 1).

Plan Development Process

The City of Fresno has typically adopted general plan updates at intervals of approximately every ten years including 1964, 1974 and 1984. In 1987 the City adopted a Local Planning and Procedures Ordinance (Article 6, Chapter 12, Fresno Municipal Code) which formalized the preparation of a comprehensive plan update every ten years. Thus, in mid-1992 the city council appointed a 27-member citizens' advisory committee to work with the Development Department staff to set direction for the preparation of plan update. A major consideration was that this plan would have a twenty-year planning horizon during which the Fresno Metropolitan area was projected to grow at an average annual rate of 2.9 percent resulting in a population of 960,000 by the year 2020.

Over a four-year period, the committee held over 100 public meetings and worked to complete its responsibilities. The committee considered numerous planning issues and land use alternatives, and there were six city council workshops to guide the committee on deciding key growth issues. The committee completed its work in March of 1997, and Alternative 10z (subsequently referred to as the 2020 Fresno General Plan) was forwarded to the council for consideration. This plan provided for a moderately reduced 2.5 percent rate of population growth and a population capacity of 920,000. On March 25, 1997, the 2020 Fresno General Plan was presented to the city council for preliminary review prior to commencing public review and hearings. An ad hoc council subcommittee, consisting of Mayor Jim Patterson and Councilmembers Bredefeld, Quintero, and Steitz, was appointed to meet with the City of Clovis and County of Fresno representatives to

determine mutually acceptable general plan growth boundaries and development parameters as provided by the 1983 Joint Resolution on Metropolitan Planning.

Efforts to achieve a consensus among the three governmental entities was hindered by a lack of agreement regarding sphere of influence expansions and by the inability of the jurisdictions to resolve tax sharing issues. When it was concluded that an impasse had been reached, the city council formally initiated the 2020 Fresno General Plan on February 9, 1999, upon the city manager's recommendation to begin the process of public review and preparation of an environmental impact report. However, the growth parameters of this planning effort were again modified on October 4, 1999, when Mayor Patterson and the city council subcommittee specified that urban development would not be planned beyond the city's urban boundary and sphere of influence as identified by the 1983 Joint Planning Resolution. This more constrained plan was titled the Fresno 2000 General Plan.

The Fresno 2000 General Plan presented urban form strategies to accommodate the year 2020 CCFI population forecast of 725,000 with a very long range concept to accommodate an additional 60,000 people within the Blackstone Avenue and Freeway 41 mid-rise/high-rise intensity corridor. These urban form strategies included utilizing all agricultural land within the urban boundary with the exception of the San Joaquin River influence area, increasing the density of the planned residential areas, facilitating infill development, and promoting innovative mixed-use developments with residential components. This proposed plan also relied extensively upon the policies and measures of the citizens advisory committee's draft 2020 Fresno General Plan with revisions to provide clarity and provide additional emphasis upon implementation and regional cooperation.

Following consideration of this plan by the Fresno City Planning Commission, the city council conducted several evenings of public hearings before concluding that additional efforts should be made to resolve urban growth and sphere of influence issues with the County of Fresno and City of Clovis. In addition, the city council identified the following six key issues to be addressed within the general plan. These issues were as follows:

1. Fresno County shall be a part of the negotiations with the City of Fresno and staff was directed to immediately arrange a meeting.
2. In agreements related to approval of Sphere of Influence boundaries or annexation, the county shall treat the cities of Fresno and Clovis with economic equity. Any procedural or processing requirement applicable to the city shall be no more burdensome, restrictive, or less favorable than those of other Fresno County cities.
3. The northwest Clovis Village should not be developed unless appropriate federal and state regulatory agencies determine that there will be no long-term adverse water impacts on the City of Fresno.
4. The city should have land use authority over the extended northeast, southeast, and southwest areas shown on General Plan Alternative 10-Z. This authority does not necessarily assume that these areas will develop with urban uses, but will guarantee that the city has the ability to adequately implement its adopted plans and policies.

5. The county will stop all rural residential lot splits within Fresno and Clovis Spheres of Influence.

6. Consideration should be given to recognizing existing rural and low density residential enclaves on the eastern and western fringes of the existing city urban boundary.

Following the election of a new City of Fresno mayor and three new city council members, intensive negotiations were renewed by designated representatives of the Fresno City Council and Mayor, Clovis City Council and the Fresno County Board of Supervisors. These negotiations addressed the above identified issues as well as agreement on a revised urban boundary and sphere of influence. Based upon these negotiations and further direction provided by the Mayor, the draft 2025 Fresno General Plan and related environmental impact report was initiated by the city council on April 3, 2001, replacing the draft Fresno 2000 General Plan as the preferred plan alternative.

Satisfactory three-party resolution of the planning and tax revenue allocation issues, however, proved to be elusive and several preliminary agreements were not ratified by the respective entities. Therefore, the general plan contains implementation and regional cooperation measures that strive to achieve the necessary consensus regarding the primary land use and resource management issues affecting the quality of life experienced within the metropolitan area and surrounding region. These measures allow for balanced growth including two growth areas to the North (Exhibit 4) and the Southeast (Appendix G) that would accommodate approximately 10,000 and 55,000 people, respectively.

The 2025 General Plan also intensifies strategies focusing upon the revitalization and enhancement of the established urban core. Particular emphasis has been placed upon new strategies to balance growth and development around a reinvigorated traditional downtown. These strategies address thirteen performance measures (contained in the Urban Form Element-Land Use/Infill Development topic) that have been identified for the urban core communities. These performance measures include development of substantial civic or public facilities (regional medical center phase I, downtown stadium), construction of 500,000 square feet of office space (either private or governmental/non-profit), increasing employment by 3,000 employees, addition of new off-street parking for 6,000 vehicles, rehabilitation of 1,000 dwelling units and construction of 1,000 new infill dwelling units (within the centre city area bound by Ashlan, Chestnut, Jensen and West Avenues). In addition, these strategies include implementation of an appropriate development impact fee mechanism that would link development in peripheral growth areas with the provision of comparable facilities and services absent in older sectors of the city (contained in the Urban Form Element-Land Use/Sphere of Influence topic).